

Latin America and Caribbean Panel

Commentary

Rafael Cartagena
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CHAIRMAN PERKINS: Our fourth speaker is Dr. Rafael Cartagena who is a former Rector of American University and is the President- Elect of IAUP, his new position to be confirmed next summer in Madrid. Dr. Cartagena, a Latin American by culture, is also a citizen of the United States. This makes him a very important bridge between North and South America both in terms of international relations and cultural understanding. He has kindly consented to add a few comments on the subject of business and higher education in Latin America. Dr. Cartagena.

DR. CARTAGENA: In the time that I have been allotted, I would like to make some general comments regarding the Latin American situation of research, employment and the university.

First, I think we have to recognize that when we are talking about research in the universities of Latin America, we are discussing a limited amount of research that is conducted at a limited number of schools. In most Latin American countries, research is done at the corporate level in the corporation's mother country which is often outside the region. For example, many multinational companies have established in Puerto Rico industries for the manufacture of goods, but the research and development need to maintain those industries is conducted at the foreign, corporate level. This situation is the result, I think, of a common mistrust corporations have in universities' ability conducting applied research. While universities in some places may do the basic research, most of the applied research especially in areas like computer technology, management, engineering, manufacturing, quality control and organizational behavior is conducted at corporate level

headquarters. In other words, Latin American universities are directed to train the manpower for the corporations, but not to contribute to research.

This situation must be taken into account in this region where there are so many multinational corporations. The Japanese corporations in Puerto Rico, for example, are very active in the fields of electronics and automotive manufacturing. However, their research is being done in Japan. When addressing the issue of research in Latin America, we must therefore talk about the potential for research *within* our countries.

The second important point I'd like to make concerns the distinction between the private and public sectors. In Puerto Rico, we have a huge private sector that is involved in higher education. Sixty-three percent of all the population in higher education is being trained by private universities. These institutions, however, do not have the resources nor the educational objectives to pursue research. They do not have the funds or the tools -- consequently they lack the potential to move into this area. So this distinction between the objectives of the public and private universities in terms of mission and research is very important in Latin America.

Therefore, I would like to stress the importance of *communication* when we are talking about the relationship between the corporation and higher education in terms of research and the training of manpower. We need to discover ways to bring together people from the corporate world and the universities. Some of the techniques that have been used in the United States to enhance this communication need to be pursued in Latin America. For example, the creation of working councils comprised of individuals from the corporation and academics from the schools who meet regularly needs to be initiated. These meetings are good opportunities for the corporations to tell the universities what aspects of the school curriculum they consider important and identify research activities which are (or are not) useful.

The universities, in turn, have the opportunity in these councils to inform the people from the corporate world of their needs. They can point out how corporations can help education by providing internships, financial resources and equipment. Arrangements can be made for cooperative education programs where students from the universities can work with the corporations

on a regular basis and earn academic credits. These students can then return to school with better skills for examining and evaluating the corporate world. This kind of program of student internships, on-the-job practice and laboratory experiences will have important applications, especially in the training of engineers in specialized fields. There is no other way the university could provide such training or equipment except with the assistance of the corporate world.

Advisory committees made up of corporation representatives are also needed - - real advisory committees where people from the university sit down with corporation people and *listen*. My experience has been that many advisory committees do not function properly because those people who receive the advice, frequently do not take the conversations seriously.

Finally, I would like to say that as things stand now, I believe that there is a need for affirmative action from the point of view of the corporations. I think that most of the corporations in Latin America have the resources, money and equipment to take such action so that with greater communication and cooperation, the gap between corporations and universities will be bridged.

Thank you very much.

CHAIRMAN PERKINS: Thank you, Rafael.